

The City of Liverpool College
Minutes of the Board meeting held on 7th October 2014

Present:

Ms Elaine Bowker (Principal)
Ms Louise Barry
Dr Martin Carey
Ms Lydia Field
Mr Peter Grieve (Chair)
Ms Vivienne Lacey (Vice Chair)
Dr Peter Tavernor
Mr David Wilson

In Attendance:

Ms Gill Banks (Vice Principal Curriculum)
Mr David Brennan (Vice Principal Partnerships
and Business Development)
Ms Angela Cox (Deputy Principal)
Mr David McIntyre (VP Finance & Corporate
Resources)
Ms Christine Lenderyou (Clerk to the Board)

14.79. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies had been received from Charlotte Burns, Sue Carmichael, Gemma Charters, Clare Crowther and John Nolan. The Chair welcomed Ms Field to her first Board meeting and introductions were made.

14.80. Confidential Item

[minute removed due to containing commercially sensitive information or information relating to third parties/individuals]

Shireen Kincade joined the meeting at this point.

14.82 Declarations of Interest

Ms Kincade declared an interest in item 9 (Appointment of Governors)

Dr Carey declared an interest in item 13 (HE Strategy)

Ms Banks would leave the meeting after item 7.

14.83 AOB

The Principal gave feedback from the FE Commissioner's recent visit. The FE Commissioner visited the College last week and intended to recommend to a ministerial committee that the college be signed off. He commented that the financial recovery was unprecedented and was not just about cutting costs. He felt good progress had been made on quality and teaching and learning and that governance was robust and challenging. Positive comments had been made regarding the culture change. The FE Commissioner felt that there should be a focus on getting the right students on the right courses, which was already something identified by the Board and Executive. Retention was an area which needed to improve. Review weeks had been included in the time tabling this year which often had a positive impact on retention. Student attendance also required improvement, but again this had already been identified. Student attendance and retention had greatly improved but the Principal has asked the Director of Learning to look at why last students had left early and this included talking to former students, teaching staff and managers and then overlaying with data analysis. Before and after Christmas were usually key times, along with March. There had been positive feedback from the Commissioner's meeting with trade unions and he had made some suggestions to them. In addition to the areas identified by the FE Commissioner, the Board and Executive team highlighted maths and English as areas of priority.

Dr Carey asked whether attendance was linked to assessments and advised that at Hope University they had improved tracking so that after two absences at seminars or tutorials there would be someone following this up. Smaller lectures had also helped and half of assessment took place in tutorial. The Principal thanked Dr Carey for his suggestions and felt there might be some aspects the College could look at using. Ms Barry referenced the earlier meeting which had taken place with the Performance and Quality Task and Finish Group (PQTFG) and the initiatives described by Dr Spall (Assistant Principal for City 6) correlated very well with Dr Carey's comments. The Principal highlighted that sometimes students felt overwhelmed so the review weeks may help with this,

The Chair thanked the Principal for her summary. In turn, the Principal thanked the Board for their support in a difficult and challenging year when governance was under scrutiny.

14.84 Minutes of Previous Meetings

The minutes would be approved subject to no factual or contextual errors being reported to the Clerk within the next ten days.

Ms Barry left the meeting at this point.

14.85 Actions from Previous Meetings

14.41 Write Off Bad Debts

An update had been provided to Mr Wilson and the Chair as requested.

14.66 Pay Award

The local UCU branch had written to the College enquiring about a pay award. The response had advised that any pay award would be for the current year.

The report was noted.

14.86 Performance and Quality Task and Finish Group (PQTFG)

Dr Tavernor reminded the Board that it had redefined the Group's objectives after the most recent Ofsted inspection. The new objectives took into account the importance of robust data and staff and managers understand the data. Testing the integrity of the information was also key. The Group would continue to operate under direction from the Board and would report back fully. Dr Katie Spall, the Assistant Principal for City 6 had attended the most recent meeting of the PQTFG and she was clearly aware of the challenges and that on reflection the entry requirements had been too low meaning more efforts had been concentrated on retaining at risk students to the detriment of more able students. The entry criteria had been strengthened and the amount of provision had been reduced. *[Two sentences removed due to containing commercially sensitive information or information relating to third parties/individuals]*. More interaction with parents was also perceived as being a positive move. A mock exam period had been established, utilising external support. The Chair asked if an update could be brought to the Board when the impact of this was known.

Act: AC

Dr Tavernor highlighted that there were some very able students in the stream who would be stretched. *[Two sentences removed due to containing commercially sensitive information or information relating to third parties/individuals]*. The Deputy Principal felt that meetings with Heads of School, Curriculum Team Leaders and the Director of Learning may be useful [for staff]. The VPC acknowledged that there had not been as much synoptic assessment so she had now built in a weekly meeting with pillars, building in time to sample assessments and triangulate with ProMonitor.

The Vice Chair asked what good would look like and how this would be reflected culturally. Dr Tavernor pointed to the use of external people being brought into support with assessment and that this had been quite well received. Dr Spall had been asked to bring Heads of School back with her to a future meeting of the Group. The Deputy Principal felt good was when teaching staff took ownership of student performance, were effective and analysed their own performance without pushing from management.

The Vice Chair suggested this was about insightful learning and the need for people to test themselves. Dr Tavernor highlighted that the programme of three A-levels was much more appropriate than four A-levels. The Principal cautioned against using the relatively low average GCSE point score on entry as a reason for poor performance as the average of 5 wasn't entirely unreasonable, although there was a need to balance. The Principal had suggested to the PQTFG that she would meet more regularly with staff.

The Chair thanked Dr Tavernor for chairing the meeting of the PQTFG.

14.87 Performance Report

Governors had discussed the success rates and related indicators vigorously at the Board's meeting of 22nd August 2014 and the recent strategic planning event so the VPPBD focussed mainly on student numbers and profile.

Some work had been commissioned on 16-18 learners particularly around equalities. The enrolment figures presented for 16-18 year olds showed a drop off of around 5% which was an improvement from 10% last year. However enrolments were still below target. There would be an enrolment drive in the half term, related to discrete occupational areas. The target was 200 enrolments but it was hard to predict how successful this would be as it was the first time such an initiative had been trialled. Partner activity was ongoing.

A January enrolment would take place too, primarily to address NEET agenda as NEET usually spiked then. Recruitment by school was shown and it was clear to see there were some big outliers with reduced numbers year on year but these reflected policy decisions by the Board to reduce provision in those areas. The remaining distribution was fairly even. The VPPBD was looking to see if there were any equality issues and presented a breakdown by gender. There was a larger reduction in males but that was unsurprising as Environmental Technology was largely a male cohort. For the first time, a free school meal bursary measure could be monitored. This cohort usually got 30% lower in their 5 GCSE A* to C. The College currently had 311 such students but this was significantly less than last year. Only 282 had actually registered for the free school meals that, for the first time, they were entitled to.

The Vice Chair asked if there was any indication where the "lost" students had gone to. The VPPBD had some ideas but these were not proven yet. Some economic factors may have been an issue, but there was also the reputational damage done to the College at being branded inadequate for over a year. The Chair challenged this as the College was inadequate in 2013/14 but numbers rose. The VPPBD felt that the timing of the initial Ofsted report being released (March 2013) meant many GCSE students would not have been influenced for 2013/14.

The Vice Chair asked whether a smart advertising campaign would take place. The VPPBD advised that some marketing regarding BTECs had been commissioned immediately after the last board meeting and had been in circulation straight away. The Principal referenced the belief that the raising of the school participation age was a raising of the school leaving age. The Chair stated that he understood the barriers but wanted to know what would be done to redress this. The VPC suggested starting with primary schools, to ensure the College was in student's consciousness at a much earlier stage. The English Baccalaureate ideal was marketed heavily to a particular cohort which may have had a bearing.

The Chair believed that the College needed to target other areas other than schools as children go to many activities outside of formal education. The Vice Chair asked whether more direct with marketing was required. The Principal had written to the Education Commissioner around advice and guidance being lacking in the city highlighting that the College welcomed students at age 17-18 after realising staying at school wasn't the best route for them but this meant the students would then have to pay for Level 3 at 18. The Principal was also writing to every head teacher to ask for entry to open evenings and *[part of sentence removed due to containing commercially sensitive information or information relating to third parties/individuals]*. The Principal was preparing to write to the three local universities asking how they promoted access through BTEC courses. When asked for his opinion Dr Carey said it was more than marketing, it needed to be around raising aspirations and that while he agreed there was a correlation between free school meals and underachievement that should never be a reason for underachievement and there were some positive role profiles from HE. Dr Carey asked would the letter to the universities be asking for information on how BTEC analysis translated against A-levels.

The Principal suggested a different approach to PR and marketing was required, coming partially from Kenyon Fraser, partially about parent connections, partially about outreach for young people plus

some great ideas which were coming through from the Creative and Digital pillar with a number of Saturday clubs around acting, games design and other areas.

Dr Carey asked was there clarity on distinct features for why people should come to this College. The Principal confirmed it was but that there was a gap in covering this. Ms Kincade was asked what she felt would appeal to students and she felt it was a good experience. She had heard that last year there were issues with staff absence. Students preferred the college way of life as it was different from school life but didn't always realise college was an option. Mr Wilson asked about timescales and suggested an action plan may be useful to governors.

The adult figures were at two thirds of target but the Principal was confident the numbers would be delivered.

Loans would be promoted, especially in areas of capacity for example Hair and Beauty from January. Some of the London colleges were contracting with people to do £1m of loans business. The College could pursue this area if it matched with quality and ethos aims.

Apprenticeships were currently over profile regarding College starts but down about £150k for subcontracted activity although there was a large portion of the year left to make this up.

In addition to the 472 HE students listed there were another 66 still to enrol. A January start had been planned for HNC Business which had been promoted as a part time course but there had been some interest in full time so feasibility would be examined.

14.88 Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP)

Feedback from Ofsted had now been included in the revised PIAP. Measures around culture were now included but had not printed out so would be circulated by email. The PIAP would be rag rated and populated further as the term progressed. Success rates has been presented at the away day but the Deputy Principal would also circulate them to ensure that all governors have had sight.

Act: AC

The report was noted.

14.89 Financial Position

The 2013/14 out turn was much as predicted with a £2.5m surplus delivered, a cash positive position throughout the year and breaking even on two bottom line accounting measures. The overall group position was *[part of sentence removed due to containing commercially sensitive information or information relating to third parties/individuals]*. The financial health score was "satisfactory" and the bank covenants had been met. The College was now out of Business Support with the bank and into an ordinary managed relationship. The year ended a little short of target but fairly close on 16-18 learner numbers; bandings meant each learner was worth a little more than previously. However reduced learner numbers would impact on next year so it was even more important to attract 16-18 year olds this year due to the lagged funding methodology. The College had over achieved significantly on Adult Skills Budget (ASB) which wouldn't be funded.

The College did not use its full loans facility but did perform very well and was comparatively the third largest provider. Dr Tavernor emphasised how significant that was as nationally colleges were only averaging 50% of their loans facility.

14.90 Financial Recovery

The VPFCR confirmed that a great number of the targeted savings had been achieved and combined with actions taken elsewhere this meant it had been possible to deliver £2.5m surplus while also investing in the College.

ASB, loan student numbers and Income Generation were the main risks to income. Income Generation had some ambitious targets. The main risks to expenditure were restructuring costs, 16-18 year old learner support and bursary costs.

The movement on the balance sheets was relatively straight forward with an increase in fixed assets and accruals but a reduction in tax creditors. The new cash position showed the lowest point would be £92k which had improved from budget where it was a negative figure.

Operational gearing would need to be carefully monitored as it had changed from 400% to 350%.

The Board commented positively on the incredible turnaround and how much effort had gone into achieving this.

Ms Kincade left the meeting temporarily.

14.91 Appointment of Governor

Ms Shireen Kincade was the newly appointed President of the Students' Union and as such was nominated for appointment as a student governor. The Board were advised that Ms Kincade did not meet any of the ineligibility criteria in the Instrument and Articles of Government. The Board approved the appointment of Ms Kincade for a period of four years as a student governor.

*Ms Kincade rejoined the meeting and was informed of her appointment.
Dr Tavernor left the meeting at this point.*

14.92 Risk Management Strategy

The VPFCR drew governors to the key things which defined risk appetite. The strategy would see the College adopt a "risk cautious" approach with the exception of the two risks outlined (culture change and financial position) which may be more "risk open". Appendix A was the current risk plan which would come to each Board meeting. Appendix B detailed the risks during the year.

[Two sentences removed due to containing commercially sensitive information or information relating to third parties/individuals]

Ms Field highlighted that a risk appetite definition of open seemed very positive, but queried whether the Board was willing to accept the increased risk of failure and whether those two items should be risk averse as they were two things which must not fail. The VPFCR agreed but in terms of cultural change the College may have no option but to take a risk open approach in order to progress with the transformation programme. Ms Field suggested that "tolerate risk" may be a more appropriate classification.

Governors' attention was drawn to page 6 where Ms Field suggested that there was repetition of the governance rating. The VPFCR agreed but commented that the strategy had been evolutionary and wasn't intended to be repetitive and could be made clearer with traffic lighting.

Regarding the risk plan itself, Ms Field used risk 12/07 (Leadership and Management) as an example and queried whether given the limited resources of the College where a risk was currently rated green there was justification for allocating further resources to it. The VPFCR believed it was important to maintain the current green rating.

Dr Carey referred back to the third column and asked if the plan was about mechanisms of managing risk, should it be assumed that a "risk adverse" approach would need minimum management of risk with "risk hungry" requiring more sophisticated measures. Ms Field felt this would be represented by the target rating.

The Board approved the Risk Management Strategy.

14.93 Potential Acquisition

[Most of minute removed due to containing commercially sensitive information or information relating to third parties/individuals]

The Board gave approval for due diligence to be carried out.

14.94 Internal Audit Annual Plan

Discussions had taken place between the Internal Audit Service, the Chair of the Audit Committee and the Executive team with the aim of producing a plan to capture key strategic areas and risks.

Ms Field commented that most of reviews looked like assurance reviews except for one which was group business and queried whether the plan gave sufficient assurance. The VPFCR said there may be some movement to the plan through the year. The Chair was confident that the College was moving in the right direction regarding Health and Safety so queried whether the review of this was an efficient use of resources. Mr Wilson commented that many aspects seemed like a quality assurance review. The cost of the Internal Audit plan would be above the sector norm at 75 days which was a reflection of where the College had been although this was a reduction from 100 days the previous year. The Principal wanted to see the spend come back in line with the sector norm of 65 days as soon as possible.

The Board delegated final approval to the Audit Committee.

14.94 HE Strategy

The strategy had been approved by the Strategic Leadership Team. The strategy now came under the remit of the Deputy Principal who clarified that although the strategy related to the current year, planning was underway for the following year. Governors felt the strategy lacked clarity and it was difficult to identify the key points although Ms Field found it useful as a new governor. The Deputy Principal acknowledged that it required further work and she would bring the strategy for the following year before the end of the current academic year.

Act: AC

14.95 Safeguarding Policy

The policy did not contain any significant changes. The Board noted that Sue Carmichael had been an effective safeguarding governor and were in agreement that she should be the nominated governor to liaise with the Local Authority when required.

14.96 Safeguarding Termly Update – Summer 2014

The report was deferred until the next meeting. The Principal verbally updated the Board on a recent safeguarding issue regarding *[part of minute removed due to containing commercially sensitive information or information relating to third parties/individuals]*.

14.97 Strategic Plan Update

Deferred to next meeting when the full plan would be presented.

Ms Kincade left the meeting at this point.

14.98 AOB

14.98.1 Confidential Item)

[Sentence removed due to containing commercially sensitive information or information relating to third parties/individuals]

14.98.2 Governor attendance

Mr Wilson queried whether attendance was an issue for governors. The Clerk said the Board compared well with other colleges in 2013/14 and there were no particular concerns although one governor had been unable to attend a number of meetings recently.

The Executive team left the meeting at this point.